

AMENDED IN SENATE MAY 3, 2007

Senate Concurrent Resolution

No. 44

Introduced by Senator Cox

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Gaines, Nakanishi, and Torrico)

April 30, 2007

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 44—Relative to the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 44, as amended, Cox. The Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day.

This ~~bill~~ *measure* would ~~request that the Governor proclaim~~ *recognize* May 20, 2007, as Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day in the State of California.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, On May 20, 1869, the steamship China landed in
- 2 San Francisco carrying the first group of settlers from Japan to the
- 3 United States. These settlers fled a bloody civil war in Japan, and
- 4 intended to establish a permanent agricultural colony in California;
- 5 and
- 6 WHEREAS, This group from Aizu Wakamatsu, led by John
- 7 Henry Schell, traveled upriver by boat to Sacramento and overland
- 8 by wagon to establish the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony
- 9 on 640 acres at Gold Hill, near the historic gold rush town of
- 10 Coloma in El Dorado County; and
- 11 WHEREAS, The colonists brought thousands of mulberry trees
- 12 for silk farming, tea plants, bamboo roots, and many other Japanese
- 13 agricultural products. They prospered at first, and participated in

1 the 1870 San Francisco Horticultural Fair, displaying tea plants
2 and plant oils; and

3 WHEREAS, In the early 1870's, however, the colony suffered
4 numerous setbacks. The drought of 1871–72 exacerbated the water
5 shortage and financial help from Japan never arrived; and

6 WHEREAS, The remaining colonists sold off most of their
7 belongings in order to survive. Some were able to return to Japan,
8 and others moved elsewhere to find more gainful employment;
9 and

10 WHEREAS, Matsunosuke Sakurai, Kuninosuke Masumizu, and
11 Okei Ito remained behind at the colony site. They were befriended
12 and employed by the Francis Veerkamp family; and

13 WHEREAS, Matsunosuke Sakurai stayed with the Veerkamps
14 until his death on February 25, 1901, and is believed to be buried
15 at the Vineyard Cemetery at Coloma, the historical site of
16 Marshall's gold discovery a few miles from Gold Hill; and

17 WHEREAS, Okei, the Schnell's nursemaid, died in the spring
18 of 1871, and was buried on the knoll of the hill which she reputedly
19 liked to climb to watch the sunset and look towards her homeland.
20 A marble headstone now marks her grave, inscribed in both English
21 and Japanese, "In memory of Okei, Died 1871, Age 19 Years, A
22 Japanese Girl"; and

23 WHEREAS, In the ensuing years, the Wakamatsu Colony was
24 lost and forgotten until after World War I, when a search was
25 undertaken by several Japanese Americans from the Sacramento
26 and Placer County areas; and

27 WHEREAS, These historians first interviewed 75-year old
28 Henry Veerkamp, the son of the pioneer family that befriended
29 the Japanese colonists. Mr. Veerkamp shared many memories of
30 the Wakamatsu Colony, and was able to disclose the location of
31 the original colony and Okei's grave; and

32 WHEREAS, The State of California designated 1969 as the
33 centennial year of Japanese immigration to the United States; and

34 WHEREAS, On June 7, 1969, then-Governor Ronald Reagan
35 and Japan Consul General Seiichi Shima dedicated a state historical
36 plaque designating the Wakamatsu Colony as California Registered
37 Historical Landmark No. 815; and

38 WHEREAS, Efforts to preserve the site of the Wakamatsu
39 Colony are currently underway, thanks to a partnership coordinated
40 by the American River Conservancy, the Japanese American

1 Citizens League, the Veerkamp family, and many others in the
2 neighboring communities; and

3 WHEREAS, Preservation of the colony site will recognize the
4 contributions of Japanese to the development of the agricultural
5 industry of California, will acknowledge the historical
6 achievements of the pioneer Veerkamp family, and will contribute
7 to a better understanding of the legacies of the Native Americans
8 who originally inhabited the Gold Hill region; now, therefore, be
9 it

10 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*
11 *thereof concurring*, That the California Legislature recognize May
12 20, 2007, as Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day in the State of
13 California; and be it further

14 ~~*Resolved, That the California Legislature request that the*~~
15 ~~*Governor proclaim May 20, 2007, as Wakamatsu Tea and Silk*~~
16 ~~*Colony Day in the State of California; and be it further*~~

17 *Resolved*, That the California Legislature encourages all
18 members of the Legislature ~~and the Governor to help educate all~~
19 ~~*to help educate*~~ Californians about the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk
20 Colony's history in California; and be it further

21 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Senate transmit copies of
22 this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.